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ACORN

(Association of Community Organizations)
for Reform Now))

Complaints regarding Service Termination)
by Peoples Gas, Light and Coke Company.)

Docket No. GL-0317

COMPLAINTS OF ACORN

Pursuant to 220 ILCS 5/10-108 of the Public Utilities Act, ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) charges that Peoples Gas, Light and Coke Company has been unreasonable and unjust in its service termination policies and practices and has violated Illinois Commerce Commission rules governing those policies and practices.

Count 1 - MISREPRESENTATION

Peoples Gas, Light and Coke Company ("Peoples") has consistently implied and stated publicly, and in the media, that paying "something," implying any amount, would allow those residential customers who had paid "nothing" on residential natural gas bills since December 1, 2000 to avoid service termination on April 1, 2001. An example of this from the March 29, 2001 *Chicago Daily Defender* is attached as Appendix A.

Some residential customers with past due amounts and facing service termination, however, have received contradictory information in their regular billings and final notices for service disconnection. Instead of paying "something," residential customers are informed

that they must pay 10 percent of their amount past due in order to enter into a deferred payment agreement (between November 1 and March 31) that would avoid service termination. The document so informing residential customers “IF YOU CANNOT PAY YOUR ENTIRE BILL NOW READ THIS NOTICE ABOUT MAKING ARRANGEMENTS TO PAY OVER TIME” is attached as Appendix B. Other residential customers have received an “IMPORTANT NOTICE” (attached as Appendix C) that also refers to payment plans requiring a 10 percent down payment, but makes no reference to paying “something” to keep an account current.

This critical communication regarding possible termination of natural gas service is contradictory, confusing, deceptive and in violation of Section 280.110e of Illinois Commerce Commission rules pursuant to the Public Utilities Act. Peoples has not “explain[ed] the rules concerning a deferred payment as set forth in this Section.” Instead, using multiple sets of “rules,” it has confused and deceived its residential customers facing service termination on April 1, 2001.

Count 2 - DENIAL OF ACCESS

Peoples customers threatened with an April 1, 2001 service disconnection have not been given sufficient time and information to participate in an arrearage program announced on March 27, 2001 by the City of Chicago and Peoples. Nor have they been given sufficient and reasonable time to arrange for the funds to participate in this program. Under the terms

of the program, if a residential customer facing termination pays one-third of the past due amount, the City of Chicago pays one-third and Peoples one-third, and service is not lost.

When customers facing service termination began calling Peoples published telephone number for the arrearage program on March 27, some were told by Peoples employees that the employees had heard of a new program, but that they knew nothing about how it was to work. On March 28, 29, and 30, the last three business days preceding April 1 service disconnections, desperate residents continued to find it difficult or impossible to reach Peoples by telephone. Telephone lines and employees were constantly busy. Peoples downtown Chicago Bill Payment Center was closed for a portion of Friday, March 30, the last day to arrange a payment plan to avoid service termination.

On April 2, 2001, the terms of the arrearage program remained confusing and unclear. Application procedures were not clear. Some customers who called Peoples to apply to the program were told they could not; that Peoples would be sending those who are deemed eligible for the program a letter. Thus, it is not clear who is eligible for the program and who is not.

Further, Peoples has not defined and made public or informed its delinquent customers of the financial terms of the arrearage program. Customers do not know what part of their "third" is owed to participate in the arrearage program and avoid service disconnection. Are they required to pay the entire "third"? Twenty-five percent of it? Ten percent of it? Or just "something"?

This has resulted in an unfair and unjust denial of access that violates the fair notice provisions for service disconnections in Section 280.130a (2) of Illinois Commerce Commission rules pursuant to the Public Utilities Act. Residential customers have not had “five days after delivery or eight days after the mailing of this notice [to discontinue service]” with the knowledge and ability to participate in the newly announced arrearage program that could allow them to avoid service termination.

RELIEF REQUESTED

1. That Peoples cease and desist from any and all service disconnections until such time as it has communicated its required payment plans for delinquent accounts to all of its residential customers in a clear and non-contradictory manner via public notices and in written documents mailed to all residential customers.
2. That Peoples cease and desist from all service disconnections until such time as all residential customers with delinquent accounts be given fair, timely, and equal access to a Peoples and City of Chicago arrearage program that may result in their avoiding service termination. Specifically, Peoples must improve telephone access for this program and insure that an adequate number of well-trained, knowledgeable and professional employees advise and administer the program. Peoples must provide clear and non-contradictory information regarding the financial terms of this program to its delinquent residential customers. Finally, Peoples must also be required to provide a reasonable period of time for customers to apply for said program and to arrange the necessary funds for participation in

it, thus avoiding service termination.

Respectfully submitted,


ACORN

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VERIFICATION

Madeline Talbott, being first duly sworn, states that she is the Head Organizer of Illinois ACORN and that the contents of this document are true to the best of her knowledge, information and belief.



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Signed and sworn to before me
this 1st day of April 2001.


Notary Public

